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ABSTRACT

This study maintains that social support systems alleviate the physical and psychological effects of stress; however, the school administrator often has no peers in the same building and therefore stands apart from any of the built in support systems developed by the subculture within his school. Further, as discovered through interviews with 35 preservice or practicing administrators, they were afraid that the overt use of a personal or a social support system as a coping mechanism would appear to be an admission of incompetence or a lack of adequate training. Additional information attained through followup interviews and open-ended questionnaires detailed a lack of current knowledge regarding conflicts faced by administrators and their use of coping mechanisms during the process of conflict resolution. Further research may illuminate ways to encourage the use of support systems for those at the top and to alleviate the stress inherent in administrative roles. (20 references) (KM)

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> People who choose to serve in critical occupations make personal sacrifices to insure their preparation and competence to demonstrate their commitment to serving society as trusted professionals.
>
> Leaders for America's Schools (1987), p. 18.

Statement of the Problem

In the drives for school reform, for effectiveness and for excellence in education, we cannot forget that it is lonely at the top. School leaders, principals and superintendents are most likely to feel this loneliness since schools are virtual "'hotbed[s]' of stress" (Williamson & Campbell, 1987, p. 109). Pre-service and practicing administrators face increasing demands on their time. Long hours at work, graduate courses to earn an advanced degree or additional certification, family responsibilities and personal commitments compete for attention and effort.

The authors conducted a study to investigate personal and social support systems used by administrators to cope with the expanding expectations and limited resources inherent in education. The results obtained on the pilot study and subsequent related research initiated by the authors are expected to influence course offerings and instructional techniques used to train students in the Department of Administrative and Policy Studies at the University of Pittsburgh to assume educational leadership positions at home and abroad. Specifically, the research study addressed three broad questions:

[1] How do administrators cope with stressful crises?
[2] What strategies, resources and supports do administrators use to deal with crises?
[3] What resources are needed to improve the support system for pre-service and in-service administrators?
[4] Can existing typologies of conflict and coping explain the use of personal and social support systems of educational administrators?

Conceptual Framework

Research shows that social networks are a powerful support system and that there is consensus that social support systems alleviate physical and psychological effects of stress (Pearson, 1987). Support networks can have significant impact on work satisfaction and stress on the job (Maynard, 1986, p.9; Rudd & McKenry, 1986, p. 370).

Recent work in psychology, sociology, anthropology, political

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science and counseling have focused on social support networks (McIntyre, 1986, p. 421). These studies have been designed to assist mental health and other professionals in understanding how to foster and augment natural helping environments (Maynard, 1986, p. 9). The definitions of personal and social support networks are myriad, but converge on several points. Social support networks are composed of individuals who care for each other and provide mutual aid which takes many forms, e.g. physical, emotional and informational (Pearson, 1986, p. 390). Personal support systems include family members. Friends, colleagues, mentors and fellow professionals combine to form a social support system for the individual. Teaching individuals to identify, establish and to use social supports and networks of helpful people increases the ability to cope with stress (Pearson, 1986, p. 394).

Are school administrators likely to use personal and social support systems to deal with work-related stress? Little work has been done in analyzing the support networks of school administrators. The literature does describe teacher networks (Armour, 1985; Raiser, 1987). The teacher literature reports the importance of decreasing teacher stress and isolation through the use of networks. One study of administrators found the culture of fellow principals to be both clan-like and isolated (Teran & Licata, 1986, p. 428, 430), a contradiction which merits further investigation. A study of the coping patterns used by exemplary principals indicates that they are more likely to use avocational/recreational and management skill approaches as coping strategies rather than biological interventions such as diet and medical treatment or personal and social support groups, and that coping strategies employed by administrators seem to be accidentally acquired rather than used as a result of training (Bailey, Fillos & Kelly, 1987, p. 81). Other popular literature urges formation of professional networks as a method of success (Rose, 1985, p. 543), but there are few studies linking networks to the success of school administrators (Teran & LIcata, 1986, p. 420). Also, review of the studies investigating the importance of professional networks is inconclusive (Rose, 1985, p.536).

The analysis of support networks can be useful as a planning tool for identifying needs and resources (Pearson, p. 392). Analysis of stressors may show a relation to appropriate support resources, although very little research has been performed in linking networks and stress analysis (Pearson, p. 394). Furthermore, there is not much research which delineates conflict of school administrators even though this has been a popular topic in the literature for the past decade, e.g. Blumburg & Blumberg (1985), Boyer (1985), Cuban (1986), Executive Educator (1985).

For this study, the usefulness of three typologies of conflict or stress in analyzing the conflicts or coping mechanisms of educators was investigated. Deutsch's (1973) landmark work in synthesizing conflict literature was consulted for a universal categorization of the objective state of affairs as perceived by the conflicting parties (Deutsch, p.11).

TABLE A
DEUTSCH TYPOLOGY OF CONFLICTS

	Objective bet/ A&B	Experienced bet/ A&B	Type of Misperception contingency	issues	parties
TYPE					
Veridical	yes	yes	no	no	no
Contingent	yes	yes	yes	no	no
Displaced	yes	yes	no	yes	no
Misattributed	yes	no	no	no	yes
Latent	yes	no	----	---	---
False	no	yes	yes or	yes or	yes

SOURCE: Morton Deutsch. (1973). The Resolution of Conflict: Constructive and Destructive Processes. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Deutsch lists six types of conflict. Veridical conflict is a true conflict between parties. That is, the conflict exists objectively and is perceived accurately by the parties. A contingent conflict is dependent on circumstances which could easily be rearranged by the conflicting parties, but neither party recognizes the alternate solutions. In a displaced conflict, the parties argue over an expressed or manifest conflict which masks the true or underlying conflict. Misattributed conflict occurs between the wrong parties. Latent conflict represents issues which are not experienced as conflicts because of repression, displacement or ignorance of the issues. False conflict occurs when there is no objective basis for it.

The second typology of conflict or stress used in the study represents work by Y. L. Jack Lam (1984) to address the conceptual gap between the studies of organizational dynamics and occupational stress. Lam's intention in presenting this typology was to map stressors with organizational processes unique to education.

TABLE B
LAM TYPOLOGY OF SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS' STRESS

TYPES OF STRESS	SOURCES OF STRESS		
	Extra-Organizational Induced	Intra-Organizational Induced	Interpersonal Induced
Role Based	Control and Direction	Authority Structure	Commitment vs. Satisfaction
Task Based	Resource Adequacy	Maintenance Function	Functional/Role Ambiguity
Boundary-Spanning	Program Demands	Supervision	Personality
Conflict-Mediating	Value Compatibility	Staff	Role

SOURCE: Lam, Y.L.J. (1984). Sources of managerial stress of the public school administrators: A typology. Education, 105(1), 48-52.

Lam expanded the work of McGrath (1976) and Gmelch (1982) to develop the Typology of Sources of School Administrators' Stress. The cells of the typology are derived from four types of stress crossed with three sources of stress. Lam explains that each cell is grounded in organizational theory (Lam, 1986, p. 48).

The first set of cells delineate stressors which are generated externally to the organization. There are **external role based stressors** which represent the political environment and the pluralistic governing structure of schools. These external role based stressors impact the school administrators's perceived control "over one's destiny." The **external task based stressors** govern the conflicts which represent the external resources at the disposal of the superintendent. **External boundary spanning stressors** are found in the number and intensity of the liaisons with various interest groups the superintendent must face. **External conflict mediating stressors** are indicative of the competing community and social values which school administrators are expected to ameliorate in determining the goals of the school system.

The second set of cells in Lam's Typology illustrate the conflicts found within an organization. **Internal role based stressors** are found in the internal demands for accountability of the superintendent from

subordinate administrators, teachers and other staff. **Internal task based stressors** are management related conflicts which arise from the allocation of organizational resources. **Internal boundary spanning stressors** are issues which arise from the quality of communication within the organization. The degree to which the superintendent is able to manage competing interests of all student and staff personnel is the next cell, **internal conflict mediating stressors.**

The final set of cells in the typology describe the stressors which are part of an administrator's personal composition and that affect his/her coping responses. The **intrapersonal role based stressors** primarily focus on the satisfaction and commitment one experiences with his/her life's work. **Intrapersonal task based stressors** are most often found in organizational information discrepancies and required job performance specifications. Personality factors which impinge on an individual's choices to relate to or to withdraw form social contacts are found in the cell of **intrapersonal boundary spanning stressors.** Values, work place, and personal life demands are related to the cell of **intrapersonal conflict mediating.**

The third typology used to analyze the respondent's identification of educational conflicts is the Occupational Stress Evaluation Grid (1987). The grid is based upon numerous studies in industry and business on the relationship between stress and work performance and is an example of the growing interest from the business community in improving employee productivity and at the same time fostering job satisfaction and tolerable stress levels.

TABLE C
OCCUPATIONAL STRESS EVALUATION GRID

Levels	Stressors	Interventions: Formal	Interventions: Informal
Sociocultural	Racism, Sexism Ecological shifts Economic downturns Political changes Military crises	Elections Lobbying/ political action Public education Trade associations	Grass roots organizing Petitions Demonstrations Migration Spouse employment
Organizational	Hiring policies Plant closings Layoffs, Relocation Automation, Market shifts, Retraining Organizational priorities	Corporate decision Reorganization New management model Management consultant inservice/retraining	Social activities Contests; Incentives Manger involvement & ties with workers Continuing education Moonlighting
Work Setting	Task (time, speed autonomy, creativity) Supervision Co-workers Ergonomics Participation in decision making	Supervisor meetings Health/safety meetings Union grievances Employee involvement Quality circles Job redesign Inservice training	Slow down/speed up Redefine tasks Support of other workers Sabotage, theft Quit, change jobs
Interpersonal	Divorce, Sparation marital discord Conflict, family/friend Death, illness in family Intergenerational conflict Legal/financial difficulties Early parenthood	Legal/financial services Leave of absence Counseling, Psychotherapy Insurance plans Family therapy Loans/credit unions Day care	Seek social support/advice Seek legal/financial assistance Self-help groups Vacation/sick days Child care
Psychological	Neurosis, Mental illness Disturbance of affect cognition, or behavior Ineffective coping skills Poor self-image Poor communication Addictive behavior	Employee assistance (referral/in house) Counseling, Psychotherapy Medication Supervisory training Stress Management Workshop	Seek support from family, friends, church Self-help groups/books Self-medication Recreation, leisure Sexual activity "Mental health" days
Biological	Disease, Disability Sleep, Appetite disturbance Chemical dependency Biochemical imbalance Pregnancy	Preplacement screening Counseling Medical treatment Health education Employee assistance Maternity leave	Change sleep/wake habits Bag lunch Self-medication Cosmetics Diets, exercise Consult physician
Physical/Environmental	Poor air, climate Noise exposure Toxic substance exposure Poor lighting Radiation exposure Poor equipment design Bad architecture	Protective clothing equipment Climate control Health/safety committee Interior decoration Muzak Union grievance	Own equipment, decoration Walkman, radio Consult personal physician Letters of complaint

The Occupational Stress Evaluation Grid (OSEG) grid was developed to assess occupational stress in work settings arising from tension between the needs of the organization and those of the individual within the organization. This tension is described as person-environment fit, a description found in the literature on stress (French, Rogers & Cobb, 1974; Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn & Snoek, 1964; Harrison, 1978). The OSEG fosters a hierarchical view of the conflicts between the individual and the organization, from the physical level to the sociocultural level and also delineates formal from informal interventions. The grid categorizes the amount of personal versus organizational control reflected in the reactions to stress at each level of the hierarchy. In so doing, the OSEG acknowledges the importance of providing appropriate support to people based on the identified stressors and prescribed appropriate interventions. The OSEG places particular emphasis on the need to reduce conflict or stress by increasing the match between the person and his/her environment.

The three typologies (Deustch, Lam, OSEG) represent slightly different perspectives on the analysis of educational issues. Deustch's typology represents classical and academic theory concerning conflict. Lam's typology represents an educational perspective on the stresses our population/sample was likely to identify. The OSEG represents the important view that certain stresses and conflicts between the individual and the organization require appropriate interventions.

The lack of knowledge concerning the relationship between personal and social support networks and conflicts and stressors foreshadows a potentially threatening gap in the design of programs for educational administrators. Research on the presence and importance of support networks in the "lonely" positions of school leadership is sorely needed.

Methods, Design and Procedure

A pilot study involving twenty students in the Department of Administrative & Policy Studies was conducted using two open-ended questions in order to investigate variables which might be important to include on the actual population. The authors found that open-ended questions yielded rich responses from the sample concerning their personal and social support systems. But in order to obtain more knowledge on the conflict and stress which prompted the need for support, focused rather than open-ended questions on these topics were included in the research study.

The study consisted of small group and individual interviews and questionnaire responses with thirty-five students who are pre-service or practicing administrators enrolled in principalship certification courses. Over half of the individuals in the pilot study group (18 of 35) responded as teachers; 14 were administrators and 2 served as head teachers, a role which crosses both areas.

An eleven-item questionnaire was developed to focus responses and to structure follow-up interviews with participants. The focus of the questionnaire was on the most critical crisis faced by the respondent and the supports used to help cope with the situation. Follow-up interviews in small groups or individually provided an opportunity to probe more deeply into the initial responses of the participants. The Deustch, Lam and OSEG formats were used to classify the responses from the formal study.

Overview of Main Findings

Pre-service and practicing administrators are reluctant to discuss the use of personal and social support systems when paired with specific conflict situations. A commonly held perception is that the successful administrator copes with crises and stress through managerial techniques and formal procedures. Typically, participants indicated little use of biological coping mechanisms such as relaxation exercises, diet, and medical intervention. They viewed the use of psycho-social mechanisms such as personal and social support networks as confidential information. Participants verbalized a negative attitude towards the use of support systems. They were afraid that overt use of personal and social support systems as coping mechanisms would be perceived as an admission of incompetence or lack of adequate training. Women participants mentioned the "superwoman" complex and males referred to the need to maintain an outward image of strong leadership abilities as barriers to the use of social support networks.

[1] How do administrators cope with stressful crises?

TABLE D
MOST CRITICAL CRISIS

TEACHER	ADMINISTRATOR
Teacher/Student Conflict	Student Expulsion
Change in Responsibilities	Supervision
Conflicting Responsibilities	Introducing Change
Job Furlough	Teacher Layoff
Resource Adequacy	Alcoholic Superior
Change and Time Pressure	
Staff Development Training	
Career Development	
Alcoholic Colleague	

The intent of this question was to elicit information regarding specific crises which participants perceived to be stressful. Several of the participants initially indicated that they did not have any crises of significance. Interviews brought forth statements which suggested that aspiring and practicing administrators are reluctant to

admit to having difficulty coping with crises. "Panicking shows I would be a lousy administrator", " I don't need any support. I do my own job" are representative quotes from participants. Open discussion of stress or the need for support systems was perceived by some participants as a sign of weakness and incompetence as an administrator. These perceptions reinforce the notion that administrators are "solo performers" in the sense that a crisis in their building or department is contained as much as possible. Any leakage of problems to a wider circle signals incompetent or weak leadership abilities. The administrator stands apart from the built-in support systems of the subcultures within schools. He/she often has no peers in the same building and may be perceived as "the enemy" or "the boss" by a significant number of school members.

Marked differences in details and severity of crisis occurred between written reposes from participants and personal interviews. For example, on the questionnaire one participant described his most stressful conflict to be a problem between himself in the role of teacher and one of his students, but focused in the interview on his loss of an administrative position due to falsification of signatures and implicit duplicity by the superintendent. The conflict described by this participant on the questionnaire is an everyday occurrence in schools which experienced teachers learn to deal with, while the second conflict is usually a unique event in any particular individual's life. The two are vastly different in terms of their impact on the individual's career and personal self-confidence.

[2] What strategies, resources and supports do administrators use to deal with crises?

TABLE E
COPING MECHANISMS

	N	%
Family, Friends, Colleagues	14	40
Management Techniques	14	40
Inner Resources	5	14
Outside Experts	1	3
Support Rejected	1	3
Total	35	100

The personal support system of family and friends, co-workers or colleagues represented 40% of the responses to the question: What services, organizations, individuals, etc. make up your support system? In follow-up interviews with respondents, such contact was described as supportive in that it allowed feelings of fear, frustration and anger to come out. Another 40% reported that they relied upon management

techniques such as calling staff meetings, conducting conferences, scheduling in-service presentations, and referring to precedence, written district policies or guidelines within the organization in a crisis. These formal procedures validated the behavior of the individual or provided a recognized path to follow in dealing with the people or objects involved in the crisis. Inner resources such as creative thinking, maintaining an upbeat demeanor, and reliance on common sense represented 14% of the responses. One respondent mentioned outside experts as the primary support system used. Rejection from the support system of colleagues and co-workers was reported by one individual.

Follow-up interviews with respondents allowed additional details to emerge from the data. Participants reported in interviews a reluctance to use personal and social support systems or to mention them on the questionnaire because they perceive successful administrators to be those who can stand alone in the face of crises. The prevalence of an isolationist view of administrators is disturbing in light of movements toward participatory management and broadened participation of the outside community in educational decision making.

[3] What resources are needed to improve the support system for pre-service and in-service administrators?

TABLE F
RESPONSES TO IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED FOR SUPPORT

PILOT STUDY N=20	%	FORMAL STUDY N=35	%
Networks	0		22
Mentors	1		12
Peers	1		0.05
Religion	2		0
Family	70		0.05
Time Management	10		1
Housework	0.05		0
No Answer	0		64

*Totals do not add up to 100 due to multiple responses.

It is significant to note that the majority of respondents in the formal study did not answer this portion of the questionnaire. Interviews, however, provided responses congruent with the pilot group. Of particular interest for training administrators, is the notion of computer networks for linking administrators and the use of specialized support groups which concentrate on the conflicts and roles

responsibilities of administrators. Responses such as, "I get no support from anyone, so any support would be an improvement", indicate the need to explore new support networks or to train individuals to use those already available to them.

Of equal importance among those who did respond were indications that no support system was needed. The "I don't need any support" responses occurred in interviews as well as in the questionnaire data. In addition, it is possible that some who left the question unanswered also feel there is no need for support systems. These responses further reinforce the notion of loneliness in the position of the administrator, as solo actor in the process of managing and leading schools. Attitudes of this type do not bode well for the reform of education and for the long-term career consequences which might be experienced by administrators who share this view.

There are also implications for training administrators and for providing support systems. One might speculate that some administrators would not respond to the creation of specialized support networks due to their denial of the need for support or their resistance to change. On the other hand, overt support networks might foster the concept that support is useful to individuals who want professional growth and not merely a certificate of some type. An expansion of the role of training programs to include support systems could be viewed as one way to open the pre-service and practicing administrator to alternative ways of thinking and to more enlightened leadership.

[4] Can existing typologies of conflict and coping explain the use of personal and social support systems of educational administrators?

TABLE G
APPLICABILITY OF RESPONSES TO TYPOLOGIES

	Deustch	Lam	OSEG
	%	%	%
Applicable	23	31	45
Not Applicable	77	69	55

None of the typologies was adequate to explain the responses of the total sample used in this study. The Deustch typology is two-dimensional and does not apply to conflicts which do not involve other people. Third party conflicts do not fall into the Deustch categories yet are prevalent in education, e.g. student-administrator-teacher or parent-administrator-teacher conflicts. The approach taken in the Lam typology does not address instructional or human relations issues except as organizational issues. Instructional conflicts such as the administrator's refusal of a teacher request to place a student in a gifted education program when there is one I.Q.

point discrepancy in the score for eligibility do not fit well into the Lam typology. Lam might attribute this to the Boundary Spanning cell, but this category diminishes the importance of considering student needs in such a situation in addition to relating to the organizational dimensions of the conflict. Lam's typology only applies to administrators, and therefore is inadequate to categorize responses of those participants who are pre-service administrators presently in teaching roles. The OSEG focuses on industrial and business settings and is weak in describing instructional conflicts or adult-child conflicts. Some interventions and support systems included in the OSEG are inappropriate for use in educational settings or with children but may be useful for administrators in dealing with other adults.

Summary

[] Open-ended questions and interview strategies seem to be more effective in eliciting information regarding support systems than structured questionnaires.

[] Conflict is not readily discussed by administrators and tends to limit their view of support systems which might be needed to deal with stress induced by conflict situations.

[] Academic and theoretic views of conflict do not provide concrete information readily applicable to the work of administrators. Typologies to describe conflict are inadequate to deal with important elements in the educational environment such as instruction, supervision and adult-child relationships.

These three findings are interrelated. Interviews and questionnaires based upon theoretical models tend to depress responses since there is little relationship between the reality of the administrator's position and the topics included on the instruments. Interviews with academics may need to depart from theory in order to open up the thinking of the interviewee. Naturalistic approaches would seem more likely to reveal types of personal and social support systems used and the individual's perception of the need for support.

It would be premature to speculate on the types of support systems needed to improve administrator preparation. Clearly, more investigation needs to be done in this area. Existing research and theories of conflict and support are constricted while the conflicts and coping mechanisms observed in the field are ill-defined, diffuse and unarticulated. The findings of the authors' research indicate that our knowledge of conflicts faced by administrators and their use of personal and social support systems as coping mechanisms is inconclusive. Some areas to consider for further research include expanding studies of organizational behavior to take into account instructional-related conflicts in the education setting, studies of coping mechanisms displayed within particular conflict situations, and investigating the role perception of administrators as loners who do not need support systems. Further research may illuminate ways to encourage the use of

support systems on the part of those at the top and to alleviate the stress inherent in administrative roles.

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